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EXECUTIVE BOARD

First regular session of 1994

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 2nd MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York
on Wednesday, 23 February 1994, at 3 p.m.

Chairman:

Ms. MAKINDA

(United Republic of Tanzania)

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This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent to Ms. M. A. Cuna, Office of the Secretary of the Executive Board, room H-12K, UNICEF House, 3 United Nations Plaza, New York.

Any corrections to the records of the meetings of this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 48/162 ON FURTHER MEASURES FOR RESTRUCTURING AND REVITALIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND RELATED FIELDS, INCLUDING FUTURE WORKING METHODS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD
(continued)

Headquarters conference facilities

1. Mrs. SHAM POO (Deputy Executive Director (Operations)), reporting on the results of the secretariats inquiries as to the various options for the establishment of separate conference facilities for the UNICEF Executive Board, said that the secretariat had assumed that the Board would require interpretation into six languages and a maximum of 100 seats for delegations. On the basis of those criteria, the secretariat had identified three alternative options, including upgrading of existing conference-room facilities in Labouisse Hall at UNICEF House; construction of new facilities at UNICEF House, either on the side facing westwards or on the top two floors; and construction of new facilities at 633 Third Avenue. The estimated cost of upgrading existing conference facilities at Labouisse Hall was \$500,000 and the cost of new construction at 633 Third Avenue, including the acquisition of 8,000 additional square feet of space, was \$600,000. In addition, the secretariat had learned that the ceilings in the top two floors of UNICEF House were probably too low for the purpose of holding meetings of the Board. Lastly, she said that, if members of the Board so requested, she could present more detailed financial information on the costs of the three options at the Board's autumn meeting.
2. Mr. GUERRERO (Philippines) said that the Executive Board's decision to discuss the matter of alternative conference facilities for regular meetings had come back to haunt the Board. The sums mentioned by the Deputy Executive Director were indeed large and it would probably be a more effective use of resources to allocate those funds to projects that would benefit children. Moreover, he failed to understand the reason for creating new conference facilities, since the intent of resolution 48/162 had been to enhance the effectiveness of Board activities "without prejudice to the resources of existing programmes and projects". Lastly, he wished to know whether it would be possible to request the General Assembly to make an exception to that particular paragraph.
3. Ms. VOLKOFF (Canada) recalled that during the meeting of the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) the possibility of sharing conference facilities with the Executive Boards of other funds and programmes had been discussed. In that connection, she would like more information as to the costs that would be incurred if the Board should decide to share facilities with the UNDP Executive Board.
4. Mrs. SHAM POO (Deputy Executive Director (Operations)), responding to the question put by Canada, said that by "sharing facilities" she meant that the UNICEF Executive Board would not necessarily share the entire building with the Executive Boards of the other funds and programmes, only conference room facilities.

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5. Mr. CARMICHAEL (Canada) said he shared the concerns expressed by the Philippines with regard to costs. While he recognized that the wording of paragraph 27 was perfectly explicit, he interpreted that paragraph as meaning that the shared facilities in question could be located at either UNDP or UNICEF headquarters.

6. Miss ARIAS (Colombia) said that the wording of paragraph 27 was very clear, particularly with regard to the urgency of the need to establish separate conference facilities for the Executive Boards. While she found the clarifications given by the Deputy Executive Director useful, it was clear that interpretation into six languages would be required and seating would be needed for 100 delegations, not 100 people. Also, further consideration should be given to the possibility of sharing facilities with UNDP. Lastly, she requested further information on the possibility of establishing joint conference facilities at 633 Third Avenue.

7. Mr. OBLIN (France) said that there was a palpable feeling of initiative and enterprise prevailing in the Executive Board and he welcomed the close attention that members were devoting to the matter of the Board's own activities. In his view, the most important aspect of the question of whether to establish new conference facilities was the need for interpretation services for all six official languages; the matter of specific locations was of lesser importance. He believed that the intention of General Assembly resolution 48/162 had been to draw the attention of the Board to the need to derive increased savings from its activities; therefore, given the costs connected with the alternatives presented to date, he saw no need to take an immediate decision on the question under discussion.

8. Mrs. SINGH (India) said it was her understanding that all functional arrangements for meetings of the Board could be discussed. Moreover, she recognized the dilemma which the Board faced in seeking to comply with the provisions of paragraph 27 when resources were lacking for needed programmes. Furthermore, she believed that the Board was spending too much time considering matters of real estate instead of the needs of children.

9. Mr. NEUMANN (Germany) said paragraph 27 of General Assembly resolution 48/162 had been intended to separate the Executive Board of UNICEF from other United Nations bodies; if interpreted literally, the resolution could mean that additional costs relating to the separation process could be justified. However, a literal interpretation of paragraph 27 did not meet the Board's needs. He hoped that the Board would also consider the possibility of using existing facilities in the DC-3 building, since use would only be made of them 20 days each year.

10. Mr. TISSOT (United Kingdom) said that he endorsed the views expressed by representatives of Germany and India. He believed the question of facilities could be discussed at a subsequent meeting of the Board. Moreover, he hoped that the Board would take a flexible, pragmatic approach that would be of benefit to UNICEF and also to the other programmes and funds.

11. The CHAIRMAN said that, in order for the secretariat to be able to make the cost evaluations requested by some members, it would be necessary to appoint experts in the assessment of real estate and construction costs, subject to the approval of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

12. Mr. HJELMÅKER (Sweden) said he believed that the costs mentioned by the Deputy Executive Director were indeed high; however, there might be much to be gained in terms of efficiency from establishing new conference facilities for the Board; he therefore believed further discussion of the question would be useful. In addition, he hoped the secretariat would be able to provide more specific information on the exact costs that would be incurred under the various options.

13. Mr. POST (Netherlands) said the figure of \$500,000 applied, in his view, only to the construction of the conference facilities and did not include other costs relating to the provision of interpretation services. Therefore, he would continue to support proposals for the Executive Boards of UNDP and UNICEF to share their conference facilities, although he understood no final decision would be reached in the immediate future. In that connection, he requested the secretariat to provide a comparison of the cost of providing interpretation services for annual meetings of the Executive Board at 633 Third Avenue; costs related to the sharing of facilities by the Executive Boards of UNICEF and UNDP; and costs associated with holding meetings in the secretariat building.

14. Mr. CHRISTIENSEN (Denmark) said he shared the concerns of the Philippines and India with regard to the need to conserve resources for programmes and projects. He also agreed with France that the atmosphere in the Executive Board had improved recently. In his view, the need for new conference facilities should be placed in a broader context that would take into account the fundamental purposes and practical objectives of UNICEF.

15. Mr. MONROE said that before any final decision could be taken on the issue of conference facilities more information regarding the costs involved and the working methods to be introduced was needed.

16. Mr. COSTA, Filho (Brazil) said that his delegation had never been entirely convinced of the actual benefits of relocation and was even less convinced of the need to share conference facilities with UNDP at its headquarters. General Assembly resolution 48/162 stipulated that facilities were to be made available as soon as possible without prejudice to the resources of existing programmes and projects. Since there was no budgetary provision for the conversion of facilities, it would seem that if the Executive Board decided to authorize the use of funds for such a conversion, those funds would be taken from core resources and thus from projects and programmes. Conference facilities should be large enough to accommodate both formal board meetings and informal briefings. Additional information regarding costs and the source of funds was needed before any final decision was taken.

17. Mr. WANG Xinggen (China) said that the relocation of conference facilities should in no way compromise funds that had been allocated for programmes and projects. Conference rooms should be large enough to accommodate Board members and observers. His delegation believed that the Executive Board should explore further the possibility of sharing facilities with UNDP.

18. Mr. HORIGUCHI (Japan), supported by Mr. BISTA (Observer for Nepal), said that the issue of premises was closely linked to issues relating to observer attendance and subsidiary organs. If the Executive Board decided that subsidiary organs were necessary, then the costs mentioned by the Deputy Executive Director would have to be multiplied by two or three. Secondly, if the Board decided that it should allow observers to attend in order to provide donors and recipients that had not been elected to the Executive Board, with a sense of participation, then conference rooms would have to be larger. His delegation interpreted paragraph 27 of General Assembly resolution 48/162 as meaning that the Executive Board was not required to set up conference facilities if doing so would prejudice the resources of existing programmes and projects. Any decision to relocate facilities should be put on hold until a majority of the members of the Executive Board considered it a necessity.

19. Mr. GUERRERO (Philippines) said that the consensus reached during consultations over the previous two weeks, both in UNICEF and UNDP, had been in favour of transparency and participation of observers; any conference facilities would therefore have to be large enough to accommodate both Board members and observers. If the Executive Board were to hold its meetings in facilities other than those located at United Nations Headquarters, it would greatly inconvenience smaller delegations whose members were required to attend various meetings almost simultaneously. Additional time was needed to consider the matter and ensure that the most suitable facilities possible were found.

20. Mr. SUTOYO (Indonesia) said that while his delegation supported efforts to restructure UNICEF, it could not agree to measures that might put an unnecessary financial burden on the agency. His delegation welcomed the idea of sharing conference facilities in order to avoid unnecessary expenditure and suggested that the secretariat should continue to investigate that possibility.

21. Mr. JADMANI (Pakistan) said that it should be made clear that any costs incurred as a result of the relocation of facilities would be met through supplementary funding. Irrespective of where conference facilities were located, whether at United Nations Headquarters or at UNICEF headquarters, interpretation services from United Nations Headquarters would be required. Therefore, the availability of conference services would be the same at either location unless UNICEF decided to provide its own permanent conference services.

22. Mr. HUSSEIN (Ethiopia) endorsed the view expressed by the representative of Japan. Since no new premises were currently readily available, it would be more appropriate to discuss relocating conference facilities if and when new premises became available.

23. The CHAIRMAN said that further consideration of the item under discussion should be postponed until the Board had received more information regarding the cost implications of a relocation. While the Executive Board did not currently have funds allocated for new premises, such funds might become available in the future. Furthermore, UNDP and UNICEF had not yet explored the possibility of sharing facilities. The Board needed to show flexibility with regard to any transition and would pursue consideration of the matter at a later date.
24. Mr. HJELMÅKER (Sweden) urged the secretariat to continue to look at all possible ways of resolving the question of premises as his delegation did not consider current conference facilities to be adequate.
25. Mr. NEUMANN (Germany) agreed with the representative of Sweden and asked the secretariat to provide Board members with a paper summing up any discussions between UNICEF and UNDP so that a decision on the matter could be taken as soon as possible.
26. The CHAIRMAN said that consideration of the matter would be resumed when all the information requested had been made available. She urged the secretariat to expedite its research in that area.
27. Mr. CHOWDHURY (Secretary of the Board), after reviewing the current rules concerning the languages used in formal meetings and for summary records, requested guidance from Board members regarding the language services for documentation and simultaneous interpretation. He said that although full facilities were mostly available for informal meetings, most of the work was conducted in English. The provision of interpretation facilities at UNICEF headquarters would depend on the decision concerning premises and the number of languages to be used. UNDP issued its country programmes in the working languages only, a practice which UNICEF might also approve.
28. Mrs. SINGH (India), supported by Mr. AGGREY (Ghana), Mr. WANG Xingqen (China), Mr. ABIBI (Congo), Mr. MONGBE (Observer for Benin), Mr. OBLIN (France) and Mr. CRAPATUREANU (Romania), said that documentation and interpretation should continue to be available in all languages at all sessions. However, discussion of the issue should be deferred in view of its link with the issue of premises.
29. Mr. ABIBI (Congo), supported by Mr. WANG Xingqen (China) and Mr. CRAPATUREANU (Romania), said that Board members' ability to express themselves with ease was vital to their full participation.
30. Mr. MONGBE (Observer for Benin), supported by Mr. AGGREY (Ghana) and Ms. FEOKTISTOVA (Russian Federation), said that the question had already been resolved by the relevant General Assembly resolutions in keeping with the spirit of universality of the United Nations. He thus vehemently opposed any restriction on the number of languages to be used.
31. Mr. POST (Netherlands), supported by Mr. HJELMÅKER (Sweden) and Mr. CHRISTIENSEN (Denmark), said that the streamlining process did not exclude a further reduction of language services for informal - and even regular - sessions with a view to the optimum utilization of resources.

32. Mr. MONGBE (Observer for Benin) said that rationalization was never intended to deprive delegations of the right to use the official languages; his delegation would strongly oppose any such violation of human rights.
33. Mr. KELLOWAY (Australia) emphasized the need to maintain balance and proportion in considering cost factors. He said that substantial annual savings could be made by following UNDP's approach of using only the working languages for its country programmes, which represented a slight departure from the relevant United Nations resolutions.
34. Mrs. CASTRO de BARISH (Costa Rica) said it would be more productive to discuss child-related issues; in any event, the matter under discussion had already been decided. Moreover, the rights of States and the principle of sovereign equality required the Board to continue its work along the current lines.
35. The CHAIRMAN said she took it that the Board wished to continue to operate in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions concerning the use of languages.
36. It was so decided.

Documentation

37. Mr. CHOWDHURY (Secretary of the Board) said that, in view of the greater frequency of regular session, it might be necessary to waive the six-week rule regarding the submission of documentation and to reduce the length and number of documents requested for each session. In that connection, the Board might consider a reduction to three weeks for the submission of documentation. He further drew attention to the recent UNDP decision that reports from the secretariat should consist of no more than three pages, with any additional information to be provided in an annex or addendum. He also referred to the UNDP decision to replace summary records with a report, prepared by the secretariat, containing the decisions of the Board, which would be distributed shortly thereafter for approval at the following session. With the exception of the annual session, for which summary records in the working languages could be provided, UNICEF could follow the UNDP example in compliance with the General Assembly resolution recommending that the respective Executive Boards should abolish summary records. Given the number of regular sessions, it might also be necessary to produce an annual report comprising individual reports from each regular session.
38. Ms. VOLKOFF (Canada), supported by Mr. POST (Netherlands), said that resources could be saved by immediately replacing summary records with shorter reports on decisions taken. Documents for action could also be much more concise, and documents for information could simply be tabled at meetings, with an agenda item being reserved for their discussion if necessary. Moreover, documents should be written for a management board, which required the use of relevant language, and should be allocated in the agenda according to issue.
39. Mr. TISSOT (United Kingdom) associated himself with the useful suggestions made by the previous speaker.

40. Mr. SIEBER (Switzerland) said that he endorsed the view expressed by the representative of Canada that the six-week rule for the submission of documents should be maintained in view of the time needed to transmit them to national authorities for comment, consultation and instructions. None the less, the Board should bear in mind the time needed to produce, translate and circulate documents. Moreover, he was in favour of following UNDP's example of restricting the length of documents to three pages, as well as replacing summary records.

41. Mr. CRAPATUREANU (Romania) said that he was also in favour of following the example set by UNDP.

42. Mrs. SINGH (India), supported by Mr. HJELMAKER (Sweden), Mr. CRAPATUREANU (Romania) and Mr. MONGBE (Observer for Benin), endorsed the suggestions made by the representative of Canada and the proposal to reduce the six-week rule for the submission of documents to three weeks, with the exception of those documents required for the annual meeting in view of the preparation to be carried out by delegations.

43. Mr. OUEDRAOGO (Burkina Faso) said that in general he endorsed the Canadian proposals, although he believed that summary records should be maintained for the annual session. The six-week rule for the submission of documents should be also maintained where necessary.

44. Mr. MONGBE (Observer for Benin) and Mr. SIEBER (Switzerland) agreed with the previous speaker that summary records should be maintained for the annual session.

45. Mr. POST (Netherlands) said that the six-week rule should be maintained only in the case of documents requiring action by the Board. None the less, flexibility was the key; the situation could perhaps be reconsidered in one year's time.

46. Mr. SIEBER (Switzerland) endorsed the point made by the representative of the Netherlands concerning flexibility.

47. Mr. CHOWDHURY (Secretary of the Board) said that the reports on the Board's sessions submitted to the Economic and Social Council were available well before the summary records, because the latter did not have priority over other types of documents, and thus were sometimes issued one year after the conclusion of a session.

48. The CHAIRMAN said she took it that the Board wished to maintain the six-week rule for documentation until it had decided on the number and duration of meetings, and to continue to receive summary records of the annual sessions, in keeping with the recent decision of the UNDP Executive Board. A brief report of no more than three pages should be prepared by the secretariat following each regular session; any relevant details could be set out in an annex.

49. Mr. NEUMANN (Germany) said that he saw no reason for treating the annual session differently from the regular sessions. Summary records could be replaced by brief minutes containing all decisions.

50. Mr. KELLOWAY (Australia) said that it was unclear whether the reports on the annual sessions would contain only the decisions reached, or also include short summaries of the discussion.

51. Mr. CHOWDHURY (Secretary of the Board) said that, in the past, summary records had been prepared for all formal meetings of the subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council; however, in accordance with the recent decision of the UNDP Executive Board, summary records would be abolished for the regular sessions, but retained for the annual sessions.

52. Mr. HORIGUCHI (Japan) said that his delegation had no objection to the proposals concerning the format of reports on the Board's sessions. With regard to summary records, however, it was uncertain whether the UNDP Executive Board had decided that summary records should be prepared for the annual session and, if so, whether UNICEF was required to follow suit. His delegation had never found it necessary to refer to the summary records, and believed that, in view of the delay in issuing them, they could be dispensed with.

Decision-making procedures

53. Mr. POST (Netherlands) said that, in the past, the Board had adopted resolutions containing a number of preambular and operative paragraphs. The formulation of such resolutions had been extremely time-consuming. His delegation proposed that, where the Board took a decision which had legal and financial implications for the secretariat, the Board should state its views concerning the actions to be taken. Where the Board was required to provide policy guidance to the secretariat, it could do so on the basis of the Chairman's conclusions.

54. Mr. MONROE (United States of America) said that the changes which the Board was contemplating would be evidenced most clearly by the documentation produced by the secretariat and by the Board. In both cases, written materials should be simple, focused and clear, and should not restate the substance of previous decisions or the history of the debate on a particular issue. At the recent session of the UNDP Executive Board, consideration had been given to using the decision-memorandum format, which would enable the Board to state briefly the decisions reached and the assumptions underlying them. That proposal would eliminate the need for lengthy drafting sessions and he urged the Board to give it serious consideration.

55. Mr. GRANT (Executive Director) said that it might be useful to refer the matter under discussion to the Bureau. It was only in the past 10 years that the Board had adopted formal resolutions; before that, it had prepared summaries of the discussions, containing agreed language, without the need for drafting committees.

56. While there appeared to be a consensus that documents should not exceed three pages, budget documents and country programmes would obviously be longer. Moreover, much of the documentation for the next session was already being translated and printed, and that process should be allowed to run its course.

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57. Mr. COSTA, Filho (Brazil) said that his delegation supported the general thrust of the simplification proposals. Three modalities appeared to be under discussion: first, a summary prepared by the Chairman on his own responsibility, without any legislative mandate, which did not appear to be a satisfactory replacement for decisions by the Board; secondly, agreed conclusions, which on the basis of the experience of the Economic and Social Council, were not likely to eliminate the negotiating process - a process often less transparent than that of a drafting group; and thirdly, a report containing a summary of the Board's decisions. While that was a useful suggestion, it might also delay the approval of decisions between sessions.

58. Mr. KELLOWAY (Australia) said that his delegation endorsed the proposal made by the representative of the Netherlands, which was consistent with the views expressed earlier by Canada. If each document included a recommendation in its three-page executive summary, that would ensure the recording of decisions taken. The Board might wish to vary the recommendations contained in the document prepared by the secretariat, utilizing the experience of the specialized agencies, which followed a similar procedure.

59. With regard to the suggestion made by the Executive Director, his delegation believed that it would be a mistake to refer the matter under consideration to the Bureau, especially in view of the decision to reduce the size of that body.

60. Mr. HJELMÅKER (Sweden) said that a draft decision should be included in the documents submitted by the secretariat. If, in the course of discussion, it became clear that the members of the Board did not agree on the decision as drafted, then the secretariat could redraft it during the meeting and present an alternative text.

61. Mrs. SINGH (India) said that, while her delegation shared the desire expressed for clear and concise language, it wished to ensure that such language reflected the outcome of extensive discussions undertaken in a spirit of transparency.

62. Mr. SIEBER (Switzerland) urged the members of the Board to bear in mind that there would be a mechanism for informal consultations during the period leading up to Board sessions. His delegation was prepared to go along with the preparation either of summaries of non-contentious decisions or of agreed conclusions.

63. The CHAIRMAN said she took it that the Board wished to find some means of presenting its decisions in a more concise format without eliminating essential points, and that, as suggested by the Indian and United States representatives, the report to be prepared by the secretariat could provide guidance to the Board in reaching its conclusions.

64. Mr. POST (Netherlands) requested the secretariat to prepare a one-page summary of the discussion just concluded.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.